

MEM Housing Task Force - Report

September to December 1990:

1. HUD Tenant Coalition:

The HUD Tenant Coalition continues to grow. We have been joined by 3 new buildings in the last 2 months: Douglas Harrison Apartments, 611 Martin Luther King Blvd., and 15 Hill St. This means we have grown from 8 to 14 buildings since we began.

The group is continuing its negotiations with Mr. Theodore Britten, the Director of the regional HUD office, in tandem with growing local scandal about the HUD office. The most recent meeting in December was a "show down" - asking why the group had not seen action on the two main items it has been requesting: 1) access to financial records and information about the buildings (so tenants can compare the "paper picture," with the reality, and 2) notice of impending inspections so that tenants can be involved in these inspections (not selected "model" apartments, prearranged with the manager).

An evaluation session followed this most recent meeting with Mr. Britten, allowing for some important leadership development and organizational matters to be dealt with among the Coalition members. Agreements were made to require that everyone be at "planning sessions" before meeting with an outside group such as HUD, and that all members follow the pre-arranged agenda. The group has identified HUD's dynamic of the top man playing the "good guy", and the second in command playing the "bad guy". They have now requested a meeting with the top man only. In addition, they have given the Director a list of specific items he is supposed to take action on before the next meeting.

Discussions are underway with the group concerning future strategies to bring pressure: a legal class action suit, media, local political action, visits to Washington D.C. etc.

In addition, the group is planning to hold a workshop on HUD's "Tenant Management and Tenant Ownership" programs, which are new, in order to look at the reality of this federal initiative: will tenants have any resources at their disposal? or is it a way to co-opt tenant leaders, and do nothing to improve the buildings?

The group has held monthly meetings of tenant leaders, and been in touch with most buildings by phone on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

The HUD Tenant Coalition played a vital role in the publication of **Tenant Action News** (see below), and in **Justice For All: A Peoples' Hearing On The Housing Crisis** (see below).

2) Coalition To Save Rent Control

The major accomplishment this fall has been the publication and distribution of the second issue of **Tenant Action News**. 9000 copies were published (an increase of 3000 from the first issue in the spring).

The **News** was distributed in a number of ways: buildings, community organizations, parent meetings of the Newark Pre-School Council, local libraries, stores, churches. The response to the this

issue has been very positive. There have been individual contacts from tenants in trouble. There have also been contacts made with new buildings which wish to join in citywide coalition. We are hoping to publish again in January, and have contacted major unions in the city asking for donations to help defray some of the costs of publication. Buildings and individuals have also been making financial contributions toward the next issue.

Another citywide project this fall was **Justice For All: A Peoples' Hearing On The Housing Crisis** held December 8, at the 2nd Presbyterian Church downtown. Tenants and representatives of the homeless spoke out on the housing crisis, how it affects them, and what should be done about it. A panel of organizations which may be called upon for support took the testimony, and a report on the Conference has been issued (copy enclosed), which in final form will be sent to local elected officials, media and other organizations. The organizations which were represented on the panel were: **the Archdiocesan Commission on Justice & Peace, the NAACP (local branch), Metropolitan Ecumenical Ministry, Newark Emergency Services for Families, Rutgers Women's Legal Clinic, and the Junior League of Montclair/Newark.** A videotape was made of the event, parts of which will be shown on community cable television.

We are still researching the 25% increase allowed under the rent control law, and plan a campaign around that once our information is solid.

3) Right To Housing

Right To Housing, the statewide housing advocacy group which we work with, held its annual meeting on November 10 in New Brunswick. This was a re-organization meeting, intended to decide the future course of the organization, and to set up functioning committees, and deal with the need for raising funds in order for the group to continue. In spite of very bad weather, nearly over 40 people attended, and were enthusiastic about volunteering for work and continuing the organization. Committee meetings and a follow up meeting of the whole are planned for January 1991.

Meanwhile, we continue to advise the local volunteer group which is putting out the statewide **Right To Housing** newsletter. The 501 C-3 status has finally been resolved. Some funds were raised this fall through the sale of a "Rock & Roll" calendar, proceeds from which went to **Right To Housing**.

4) Assisting Tenants

We have been very involved in ongoing problems with the following buildings:

* Amity Village - Here there was a good resolution to the problem of walls knocked out without a building permit. After letting the problem sit for 3 weeks, the landlord responded to pressure brought by the tenants and did the necessary repairs. However, other buildings in the Amity Village complex continue to be in need of assistance. One building in particular has had no heat for 2 years due to a defective boiler. We are working with the tenants to keep the pressure on.

* McEvoy Towers - Here after getting rid of a problem manager, the tenants successes have not been as visible. They are continuing to deal with a very bad no heat problem, and a fungus growing in the apartments because of leaks from the roof. We helped them organize to attend a City Council meeting, a petition drive in the building. And currently are working with them on a letter to the

Mayor, and the media.

* We are continuing to advise a tenant leader who has been targeted by her landlord for speaking out at 440 Elizabeth Ave.

* We continue to work with Aspen Riverpark, Brick Towers, Garden Spires, Hill Manor, Douglas Harrison Apartments concerning ongoing problems ranging from lack of window guards, lack of heat, insufficient security, roof leaks, no hot water, etc.

* A request to hold a tenant organizing meeting at Hill Manor ran into opposition from the manager. We are still working on a way to do it.

5) Miscellaneous

Rutgers Women's Legal Clinic contacted us for help in distributing their new booklet on women's rights when they are harassed by their landlords.

In September, 1990, tenants staffed a table at the Newark Peoples' Festival, a large multicultural annual citywide event, where they sold buttons and handed out information on Tenant Rights.